FLAME IN THE WIND

GRACE NOLL CROWELL

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Flame in the Wind

BY

GRACE NOLL CROWELL

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"White Fire," "Silver in the Sun"
"Miss Humpety Comes to Tea," "Songs for Courage"
"Bright Destiny"

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TO THOSE FRIENDS

Whose faith in me
Has fanned a flame, and kept it burning,
I dedicate this book most lovingly.

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FLAME IN THE WIND

SUMMER WIND

THE poetry of earth runs through this wind
Like green-gold ribbons, and like scarlet flame:
The upper boughs are tossing, greenly thinned,
Upon a blue too crystal-clear to name.
And every swaying tree is filled with song,
And every leaf, a lyric in the sun;
There where the undulating grass is long,
The stately measures of great sonnets run.

I read it, and it takes my breath away;
I listen, and am shaken to swift tears—
There is more poetry in this brief day
Than men have written through the countless years:
More poetry of music and of light
Than any pen on earth shall ever write.

GOD KEEP A CLEAN WIND BLOWING

GOD keep a clean wind blowing through my heart,
Night and day,
Cleanse it with sunlight, let the silver rain
Wash away
Cobwebs, and the smouldering dust that years
Leave, I pray.

God keep a clean wind blowing through my heart:
Wind from far
Green pastures, and from shaded pools where still
Waters are;
Wind from spaces out beyond the first
Twilight star.

Bitterness can have no place in me,
Nor grief stay,
When the winds of God rush through and sweep
Them away.
God keep a clean wind blowing through my heart
Night and day.

FLAME IN THE WIND

FLAME in the wind running higher and higher,
Color the darkness with your fire,
Light up the earth, light up the sea,
Burn all the dross that lies in me!
Clean up the old earth as you pass,
Burn up the stubble, burn up the grass,
Terrible beauty running wild,
You are the Sun's and the Lightning's child.
All of their fire, all of their light
Runs in your fiery veins tonight!

"FIRE!" "FIRE!" they run and shout,
They put your beautiful, bright flame out!
O lovely, flickering thing gone black—
Flame in the wind, come back! Come back!

THE MORNING HIGHWAY

THIS is a morning heady with green wine!
The long white roadway leaps to meet the sun;
The bordering bois d'arc hedges gleam and shine;
The cottonwood's thin tinkle has begun.
A wheatfield's golden dream goes drifting by;
The flashing cornblades pass, and in a word
God writes a poem, sharp against the sky,
With sunlight on an orange-breasted bird.

The morning is so fresh, and sweet, and young,
It surely must remind Him of the day
He rounded out the new green earth, and flung
It out to roll the centuries away—
Before men webbed the sod with roads that run
Such eager-hearted journeys to the sun.

DIM ROAD

MY FEET have found the wheel ruts in the grass
Where once old wagons creaked their slow way
home;
A startled heron lifts its wings to pass
Into the dusk across the slough's dark loam;
The spicy scent of alders sweeps the land;
A hare lopes swiftly down the furrowed ground;
The moist night wind is like a healing hand;
In all this still, dim world there is no sound.

And drugged with sleep, the old forgotten road
Recalls no more the tramp of tired feet,
Or wagons creaking homeward with their load,
Along a summer twilight, vague and sweet.
Dear God, the paved ways glitter and they shine,
But something of this dim road's peace is Thine.

A TREE UPON A HILL

IF I could stay upon this high green hill
A long, long while, and watch that tall bright tree,
Something of its strength would brim and spill
Into my heart to soothe and strengthen me.
And something of its quietness and pride
Would fall to me, and something of its grace
Would walk forever after by my side,
And I would bear its imprint on my face.

But I go down along old hurried ways,
Where fevered men and women move as one,
With never a high hill glimmering through their days,
And never a sweep of leaves beneath the sun.
God, let me keep a vision of a tree
Before my eyes to soothe and strengthen me.

CLEAR EVENING

SUN down, and moon up,
And one star over the hill,
The evening—clear as a crystal globe,
And very still.
A cold light over the snow,
Save low in the eastern sky,
There is a moment when rosy fires
Fade and die.

Sharp on the deepening blue
A black spire pierces through,
And the only sound I hear
Is a boy's voice calling clear,
High and clear on the air
To a comrade—lost somewhere.

I think I shall not mind
When my brief day is past,
If only I shall find
My sight unblurred at last,
If only I may hear
High on the evening air
A comrade—calling me
From over the way somewhere.

Sun down, and moon up,
And night—but I shall not fear
If my last hour on earth will be
As clear as this hour is clear.

A WOMAN SITTING IN THE SUN

I SAW her sitting in the sun
Beside her open door:
A woman with her work long done,
And something in the look she wore
Arrested me—it was so still,
So calm and quiet, and her eyes
Were cool and deep, and very wise.
I could not pass, my whole heart yearned
To know the secret she had learned.
I paused and watched her wistfully,
And glancing up, she smiled at me.

We sat together in the sun,
I told her my desire—
The fever of the days had run
Within my heart like fire.
She smiled, she said, "Child, I am old,
And there is little to be told,
Save this, I long since learned to know
That life is good, and if we go
Quietly at work or play,
Then there is strength for every day;
That if our need be small or great,
The help will come if we but wait."

We sat together in the sun,
The woman who was very wise,
And I, who never shall forget
The words she said—her quiet eyes.

SONS

TO PRESS my lips
Upon a fair cheek, or a brown,
Of my young sons—
So long I have stooped down.

But suddenly to-day, to my surprise,
I find that I must lift my eyes
To meet their eyes;
That I must stand on toe tips
And reach up
To kiss their lips.

These tall young sons,
Each straight as any pine,
Can they be mine?
Soon I must share them,
Soon I know that they will go;
But Oh, I am so glad
That I have had
Small sons to stoop to,
Tall sons to reach to,
Clean sons to give
That other sons may live.

THE LITTLE LOST BOY

HAS anyone seen him? Where did he go?
I lost him, Oh, ever so long ago.
Tell them to search for him, I cannot say
What road he took when he went away.
Tell them to watch down each alley and street:
Ways he went often on light, flying feet;
Look through the meadows where he used to run,
Follow where silver streams leap in the sun;
Search for him everywhere, he is so small,
One might pass by and not see him at all;
But if they find a boy—if his eyes shine,
If his hair blows in the wind, he is mine.
If he is laughing, dancing with joy,
They may be sure that he is my boy.
Tell them to search down the world's farthest track,
And Oh, if they find him—please bring him back.

A PRAYER FOR COURAGE

GOD, make me brave for life,
Oh, braver than this!
Let me straighten after pain
As a tree straightens after the rain,
Shining and lovely again.

God, make me brave for life,
Much braver than this!
As the blown grass lifts let me rise
From sorrow with quiet eyes,
Knowing Thy way is wise.

God, make me brave. Life brings
Such blinding things.
Help me to keep my sight,
Help me to see aright,
That out of the dark comes light.

A SONG FROM SORROW

OUT of my sorrow I shall make a song,
So beautiful that other's grief will cease.
If one but listen, silently and long,
I promise him my song shall bring him peace:
One clear high note of faith, one note of cheer,
And one of courage, flung against the sky;
But not one tremulous, low note of fear,
And not one muted, agonizing cry.

Oh, I shall make my song a thing of light.
The darkness only can put forth a star;
And out of sorrow—darker than the night—
A song shall lift that men will hear afar,
And listening—with faces, eager—glad—
Will say, "Where is the sorrow that we had?"

NIGHT

THANK God for night, with its great gift for sleep:
More wonderful than all His gifts to men!
For stars that walk the dreamways, and that keep
Their wide-eyed watch until dawn breaks again.
Thank God for blessed silence down the land:
More soothing than the drip of summer rain;
For darkness, soft and cool as some dear hand
Laid on a forehead, feverish with pain.

Oh, only those who carry sleepless scars,
Can know how sweet sleep is that comes at last;
And only the eyes that have looked long at stars,
Have learned night's secret as it marches past;
Have learned to know how quiet God must keep
To guide an earth through stars that men may sleep.

I SHALL WALK TODAY

I SHALL walk today upon a high green hill,
I shall forget the walls and the roofs of the town;
This burden, strapped to my back, shall be unloosed,
And I shall leave it there when I come down.

Warm is the hill upon which I shall walk today,
Gold is the sun upon the close-cropped grass,
And something of the peace of grazing sheep
Shall permeate my being as I pass.

Something of the look within their eyes
Of upland pastures, and of clean wind blown:
The tranquil, trusting look of those who know
A shepherd watches, I shall make my own.

And I shall gather the little wind-flowers there,
And press their sweetness upon my heart to stay,
Then I shall go back to the walls and the roofs of the town,
Stronger than I have been for many a day.

SUNLIGHT, AND A LONG BRIGHT WIND

SUNLIGHT, and a long bright wind,
The shadows running black on the grass,
The low clouds race, and the ruffled wings
Of blown birds lift and pass.

Out of nowhere the long wind comes,
And who can say where at last it goes?
And where does a shadow have an end?
There is never a soul who knows.

I am one with the long bright wind,
And I am a blown bird lifting high,
And I am the shadow, swift and dark,
That races across the sky.

Out of nowhere we each have come,
And where, and when, and how shall we go—
The wind, and the blowing bird, and I,
And the shadows—who can know?

PATHS

OLD fashioned ways are loveliest,
And little paths that lead
From yard to yard, and door to door,
Are beautiful indeed:
The little paths where neighbors go
To meet each other's need.

Such friendly little paths they were,
For comfort and for cheer,
For understanding hearts that went
To laugh, or dry a tear.
I wish that I could find a path
Among the grasses here.

I wish a neighbor would come in
And drink a cup of tea.
Oh, I would laugh with her, or if
She grieved, and needed me,
I would reach out warm arms and fold
Her close in sympathy.

The old world has grown large and strange.
It was not so before,
For once inviting paths led up
To every friendly door.
Where are they now? I cannot seem
To find them any more.

GOLDEN COSMOS

LATE gardens hold these discs of floating gold,
That permeate them strangely with a light:
Through autumn's sunshine, through its rain and cold,
They glow like lanterns carried in the night.
Their fragile, thready stems hold all the weight
Of hoarded sunshine, yet the gold wheels swing
As delicately, light, as if to wait

A moment poised, before they take bright wing.
Late gardens only know such ecstasy:
Such clear, clear gold, such spider-spangled air:
Cosmos adrift upon a gauzy sea—
Too poignant, beautiful, for hearts to bear!
Let us be silent—this may be the hour
The spirit takes its far flight from a flower.

PETUNIAS

I NEVER see the white or purple cup
Of a petunia lifted up
And blowing brightly in a garden bed,
But one comes back
Who is dead.

Who is dead—
And yet today
Should I pass along the way
Where the purple, white, and pink
Of petunias blow, I think
She would come alive and walk,
She would smile, she would talk
With the same gentle grace
That became her long ago,
With the light upon her face
Of petunias as they blow.
And the checkered shade would stir
With the passing by of her,
And her words would be sweet
As the blossoms at her feet:
Faint and sweet her lovely words
As the brushing wings of birds.

Palely, palely she would go
Down the garden walk, I know,
In the flowered gown she wore
Long ago.

Petunias? Petunias?
Do not plant them any more.

TRINITY

A MAN is the sill and ceiling of his house;
He is the straight walls rising from the earth;
A woman is the golden glow of lamps,
The firelight on a hearth.

A man is to his house a sheltering roof,
A wind-break, and a refuge from the rain;
A woman is the warm, bright scarlet flower
Beyond a window pane.

Their children are the air and sun that sweep
Through open doors—a cleansing thing, and good:
A Trinity on earth that makes a Home
Where once a house had stood.

THE FIRE TENDERS

WOMEN through the years have stood
Watch above a flame.
Keeping it a glowing thing
For the ones who came
Hungry, tired, when the night
Marks a kitchen's warm, red light.

Nothing lovelier, I think,
Than a woman's face,
Calmly bent above a fire,
As with quiet grace
She moves clean, deft hands to make
Food more wholesome for Love's sake.

Something great and beautiful
In her simple art—
Something to delight the eye,
And make glad the heart:
Women—tending fires that men
May be strong to work again.

MAGIC

SOME women have a magic way
Of putting cheer into a room:
A swift, transforming touch that sends
The light into a shaded gloom.
They have a lovely way of giving
A cheerful, happy look to living.

A wood fire crackling on a hearth;
Old brasses rubbed and gleaming bright;
Red tulips in an earthen bowl;
The luster of worn boards scrubbed white—
Some women have a way of knowing
That household wares should be kept glowing.

I never see a woman's hands
Move swiftly at their burnishings,
But that they always seem to bear
A likeness to white, flying wings:
They are so beautiful at giving
A cheerful, happy look to living.

LINEN

I LOVE old linen:
Linen with the smell of cedar
Clinging to it,
And the look of age upon it.
I finger it, and press it to my cheek
To hear it speak.

Shimmering before my eyes there lies
A blue, blue lake of water
Which is flax,
Blossoming and rippling in the wind,
And through the gleaming haze, a wheel, a loom—
A spindle and a distaff, and a gleaming thread,
A woman moving lightly through the room,
And there, at last, a shining width unfolds:
Cloth for her household, linen for her bed.

Beside a window, sunlight in her hair,
Some woman sat, embroidering this square,
Her needle weaving intricate white flowers
Through the long golden hours.
The petals are old ivory with the years,
Yet still gleam on,
Although the one who fashioned them is gone.
Old linen is so beautiful to me.

All women love new linen:
Damask gleaming bright,
Its long lengths of loveliness as cool as rain;
Creased cases shaped to pillows for the night,
Sheets folded smooth and white.
A chest of linen is a woman's pride.
Oh, every piece I own, though new or old
I hoard as any miser hoards his gold.
Linen has always seemed to me
To wear such conscious dignity.

I HAVE SEEN A VALLEY

I HAVE seen a valley with a blue mist blowing,
The shadows hanging over it like wide-winged birds,
And splashing through it blindingly, the sun's gold showing:
A living thing of light and shade too exquisite for words.

I have hung it in my heart to keep it there forever,
And when the day is long and dry, and furious with heat,
I walk along a corridor, and turn to it and ever
Find a valley with a mist, blowing cool and sweet.

It drenches me like silver rain, and I am ever knowing
A secret place of loveliness, of light, and shade, and shine.
I have seen a valley with a blue mist blowing,
And it has come to be a thing imperishably mine.

RIVER DUSK

QUICK, for night is coming down the river!
Whistler could have held this, why not I?
Quick, my pencil, make slim alders quiver,
Stencil that frieze against the western sky;
Catch the sound of low wings whirring, wheeling,
The lip-lap of the water, the deep blur
Of mist and shadow—hold the breathless feeling
Of wet wind where the shore-lined willows stir!

Pencil, paint beneath deft, flying fingers,
That dim, high bridge, that wash of silent grays,
Make this moment, while the late light lingers,
A misty miracle of beauty for all days . . .
The dark, swift night has come, and I could cry!
Whistler could have held this, why not I?

RED EARTH

I KNEW the black earth of the North
As a child knows its mother:
The black land that my father owned,
And I knew no other,
Until one dazzling sunset hour—
The South, with its red earth glowing,
And here was I in a strange, bright land
Little knowing
That I would take deep root within
This red soil, and would love it,
More than I loved the black earth
With the North wind above it.

My first sight of the red earth
Shall never be forgotten:
Sunset, and a red land
White with cotton;
Sunset, and the red hills,
And wild asters blurring
Every gully purple where
A late wind was stirring.

Always from the North a call,
Through the sweet blue distance—
Always from my father's land
A definite insistence.
But my roots have struck so deep—
Deep beyond believing
In this red soil of the South,
I shall not be leaving.

SUMMER NIGHTS IN TEXAS

DAYS must be hot to make the cotton white,
And have their own peculiar yellow glare,
But when the Gulf wind booms its way at night,
There is no lovelier darkness anywhere.
I lift my face—I turn toward the South,
My hair blows loose—the wind along my path
Is like a drink to any thirsty mouth;
Is like a plunge in some soft-water bath.

I drink the wind! I bathe in it! I dive,
With outstretched arms, a swimmer in my glee!
The wind has made me gloriously alive,
Its waves roll in, and they sweep over me!
No day can be too hot, too long and bright,
If it be followed by a Texas night.

RED BUDS

NOW I have come to watch for it as one
Goes seeking an oasis through dry lands.
Before the earliest spring days have begun
I search for it with eyes, and heart, and hands,
And suddenly down some dim wooded way
I catch the glimmer of a misty light:
The smoke of lavender through leafless gray
That clutches at my throat, and blinds my sight.

And soon each little spangled red bud tree
Will loose its loveliness upon the air,
To shake my heart with quivering ecstasy,
And leave me breathless—wordless—but aware
That never would a Southern spring be spring
Without this delicate, frail blossoming.

I SAW MY FIRST BLUEBONNET FIELD

I SAW my first bluebonnet field today,
It took my breath away.
It was so blue beneath the Texas sky,
It made me want to pray.
And Oh, I was so very glad to see
That beauty spread for me,
And infinitely pleased that God should take
Such trouble for my sake:
To let the old brown-crusted earth break through
With such strange heavenly blue;
To let a barren field be frosted white
With such strange heavenly light;
That He would take the pink that dawns all wear
And let them sparkle there.
I watched that field upon my knees today—
It made me want to cry.

NEGRO GIRLS

NEGRO girls have their own
Strange, exotic charm.
They mark their race
By moods, shadowed on a face;
A movement of a foot, an arm,
Betrays them as they pass
In a passion of bright silk
And colored glass.

Something entered in their blood
Holds them things apart:
They love, they hate,
The fury in them does not wait,
Embers, smouldering in their veins,
Fire them one by one
Like lighted torches,
These bronze daughters of the sun.

Hurt, they do not die of grief,
But pour their deepest pain
Back into song.
They bear old heavy burdens long,
And laugh, children of rain and sun.
They make me want to cry,
And why, I wonder,
When they are happier than I?

A MOCKINGBIRD UPON AN AERIAL

THERE, like a feather dropped from some gray cloud,
You set the slender aerial on fire,
And quench it with a sudden shower of sound
That runs like water sparkling down the wire.

Your quick, staccato notes are silver-clear,
A gay guitarist there, you pick the strings:
The aerial is vibrant with the sound.
You teeter, whirl, and settle your gray wings.

And sing again until all heaven shakes,
And earth is trembling with each piercing note;
You pirouette, and light again, and toss
A spray of color from your bursting throat.

An archer, now, you bend your sun-tipped bow,
And shoot three silver arrows high, then wing
Your wild sweet way to some sky-land, and leave
The aerial a bleak and lonely thing.

TWILIGHT CONCERT

THROUGH the half light the organ's gold pipes gleam,
The shadows hold the stain of painted glass,
The city's noise grows dim as some lost theme,
And like a dream the waiting moments pass.
A hand has found the keys, a torrent breaks,
The walls drip music, and the ceiling sings,
The windows throb, a quivering echo wakes,
Along old oaken beams a clear bell rings.

Now dark with shaken passion, now a-light,
Where ecstasy runs shouting to the stars;
Now peace is coming, slow and still and white,
The old desires are ashes, pain, but scars.
And on and on the clear notes sob and sing,
And say to every heart a different thing.

THE IMAGE MAKER

STRANGE things they make of plaster and of paint,
These ardent, dark-skinned people as they work:
Completed, stands a bulldog and a saint,
A dancing girl, a parrot, and a Turk.
Here Raphael's "Bearing Grapes," a thing of grace;
A whistling newsboy stands with painted lips;
Pomegranates tumble roundly down a vase;
Upon a plaster rim a white dove dips.

Exotic, ugly, beautiful, they are:
Expressions of some inward, nameless ache;
Wild fancies caught from near lands and from far,
And passionately held for beauty's sake;
And the old urge to make unto themselves
Strange likenesses to place upon high shelves.

A POEM TO A LOVELY GIRL

(To S. E. M.)

SUCH pretty little ways you have,
Such pretty things you say,
I watch you, and I feel the lilt
Of wings across the day;
I see you, and I catch the sound
Of little winds at play.

Such pretty, shining, dainty ways:
Swift motions sprayed with light,
Your voice is tipped with silver flutes,
Your hands are quick and white;
You turn your head and make me see
A gold finch poised for flight.

And oh, your fluted, lovely words!
So honey-clear they fall,
So flower-sweet, I think the bees
Must listen for your call.
Were I a bee, I could not leave
The words you say, at all.

WINDY DAY IN THE WOODS

AUTUMN day, and a high wind blowing,
A lash of boughs on an arc of blue,
The scarlet tips of thinned leaves showing
The drip of blood where the sun shines through,
And this aching, blinding, yellow light
That dazzles and robs the eyes of sight.

A sweep, a swirl, and a flame of madness,
The old woods loud with an ancient call;
The spirit of fire and smoke and gladness
Runs wild with the wind above it all,
With the wind in the maddest, gladdest race
Through the maze of this gold and scarlet place.

Color, and sound, and the voice of laughter,
The shout of the trees, and the grasses' song,
A clamoring day that forever after
Will beat at the heart like a quick-struck gong:
An exaltation, a flame, a call,
A canvas to hang on a sunlit wall.

TO A FELLOW POET

YOU have used such little words
In these brittle lines,
But the poem you have made
Lives and sings and shines.

Simple words a child can read,
Words he understands,
Small drab words that have become
Diamonds in your hands.

Common words a careless tongue
Uses every day,
Yet you make them take my sight,
And my breath away.

TO A YOUNG GIRL

I WHO have gone the way that you must go,
I, who have learned so much that you must know,
Watch wistfully, and long to take your hand
Through a strange land.
To walk the way with you, and side by side,
Swerve from the rocks on which I fell and cried,
Swerve from the rugged path that grows too steep
For feet to keep.

I, who have surely touched Reality,
Turn today, to go with you and see
Once more the morning highway glimmering bright
With shimmering light.
To watch you, with the dreams still in your eyes,
Meet at each turn some exquisite surprise:
A blue-winged bird, a wild rose in the grass,
Too sweet to pass.

Dear little girl, before our journey's end,
Perhaps—perhaps—around some blossoming bend,
Young Love will come, and running straight and true,
Will come to you.
And I will leave you then—as shadows pass—
Over the long, sweet blowing summer grass—
Glad, glad for you—Dear little girl, I know.
When I should go.

THE FISHING PORT

I CAME upon it when the sun was low,
And saw the small roofs crimsoning with fire.
The weathered dories caught the afterglow,
The color tipped a sail, a mast, a spire.
The sand was patched with scarlet, and the bay
Was quivering with broken lines of light;
The children's voices echoed at their play;
The anchors sounded, dropping for the night.

The blue smoke curled, the fisher wives began
Preparing evening meals of fish and bread,
Each thinking of her children, of her man,
And they were coming, hungry to be fed.
While I, alone, upon a darkening shore,
Stood as one stands outside a close shut door.

THE MINING TOWN

UGLY and bleak and bare, the mining town
Lies sprawled against the mountain in the sun.
A treeless sweep of jagged rocks run down
To where the weathered houses, one by one,
Cling bat-like to the cliffs as if to wait
Indefinitely some impending doom;
But one small yard shines green, and by a gate
A dusty red geranium lifts its bloom.

Some starved heart here loves beauty, this I know,
But some have ceased to care, and some forget.
Men toil within the dark, their women go
About their dingy household tasks, and yet—
Oh, even here, Love comes that takes the breath,
And here is Birth, and Life, and here is Death.

I HEAR A WILD BIRD SINGING

THREE dark notes etched with silver
Come throbbing through the rain,
And at my heart there clutches
An old forgotten pain,
And a quick, remembered rapture
That I shall not know again.

Three whirling notes flung skyward
From one small feathered throat,
And on the air is color,
The mist-veils swirl and float.
A bird is hurling rapture
To the high winds with each note.

He draws a bow at random,
He starts a quivering dart—
The rain-drenched blossoms shatter,
A wet bough breaks apart.
A wild bird with his arrow
Has pierced me to the heart!

APPLE ORCHARDS

THE hills still wear their glory like a crown:
The old, old hills where apple orchards stand.
I know how all the grassy slopes sweep down,
An ecstasy of light along the land.
Although I have been gone so many years,
I still can hear the sunny sound of bees
Above warm blossoms, and through glimmering tears,
Can see the moonlight on old apple trees.

I would recall one orchard, were I dead,
That wears the spring's delirious white and pink;
Each autumn finds it globed with gold and red,
And tanged with cider—oh, sometimes I think
I catch across the city's strangling dust
The scent of it . . . I must go back, I must!

COUNTRY CHURCHES

SYMBOLS of faith, they lift their reaching spires
Above green groves down many a country way,
And on the wide plains there are altar fires
That light the forms of those who kneel to pray.
And I have seen them, stand knee-deep in wheat:
White country churches, rising from the sod,
Where men, in gratitude for bread to eat,
Have paused, and reared their altars to their God.

Symbols they are to mankind's daily need:
The urgent need to pray, the need to praise.
Without their altars, men grow blind indeed,
And grope, bewildered, down unlighted ways.
The look of God is over every land
Where men have toiled, and where their churches stand.

MY FATHER

MY father's body has been part of earth
So long. Remembering him now
I think he always was a part of it:
He loved his great fields so—his plow—
The furrows turned and fragrant at his feet;
A meadow, where the hay stood tall and sweet—
Scanning it closely, noting its look of brown,
He knew so well the day to cut it down.

He had an understanding with the years:
Trusting them—tilling the ancient soil—
Knowing that rain would come though drought be long;
That the harvest would reward his toil.
Finding a joy among his apple trees,
Pruning his grapevines, hiving his gold bees,
Counting the nosing small pigs one by one;
Glad for the doorstep rest—the milking done.

My father's body has been part of earth
So long. I like to think that he
Has never minded when the cold be great,
Or when the rain beat mightily.
I like to think the wide green acres keep
A friendliness for him who lies asleep;
That he who loved the earth's brown, broken loam,
Rests in its heart, as one who has come home.

A WET MAY

A DARK dawn, and a wet wind blowing,
And never a farmer about his field,
Every one low in his spirit, knowing
How little will be the harvest's yield.

Heavy the leaves, and the trees wild tossing,
Rank grows the grass, yet the cattle low,
And the bridges out, and there'll be no crossing
Over the streams where the waters go.

Always the house, and its roaring gutters,
The flap of the leaves, and the wind's wild beat,
And men sit still with ominous mutters
Of "unturned furrows," and "little to eat."

But the one of them, whom I love, goes saying,
Over and over, "God's way is good,
If we but wait for Him He will be staying
The rain, and the harvest will come as it should."

Always and always his high faith glowing,
Out through the darkness, and out through the rain:
"There will be seedtime, there will be sowing,
The harvest will come, and there will be grain."

IRRIGATED LANDS

OUT of the desert's ugliness has sprung
A clear green glory, and a flame of bloom.
The old earth laps her eager, thirsty tongue
Through water doled from lateral and flume,
And gratefully gives back her song of praise
In wheat and corn, in barley and in rye,
In gold and scarlet fruits, in silver sprays
Of poplars tossed like fountains on the sky.

The rivers and the proud, reluctant hills
Were forced to yield their water to this land.
The scent of sage is lost—the valley fills
With shadows where great apple orchards stand.
And out of barren rocks, and bitter loam,
A garden springs, and man has called it "Home."

OLD MOTHERS

THEY draw me to them: women who have grown
Wise with the wisdom that right living brings.
Old mothers who have suffered and have known
A triumph over many conquered things.
Who have grown gentle, trusting day by day,
Who have grown patient, serving through the years;
Who, having prayed much, have learned how to pray,
And weeping—learned how futile were their tears.

They wear such certainty within their eyes:
A sureness that no questioning can shake;
All is so clear to them—they are so wise,
The way was made so plain that they should take.
If one should come to them—his faith grown dim,
Their faith would light the fires anew in him.

TO ONE GROWN VERY OLD

TO see your splendid strength go down
Like a wayside pool when the rains are past,
To see you slowly, surely sink
Back to earth at last.

To mark your high, bright head brought low;
Your swinging steps grow slow—until
You only go a little way,
And falter at a sill.

To see your hands that once moved swift
And surely through glad household days,
Lose one by one their old sweet tasks,
Their deft, white-flying ways.

To see your eyes, like lamps burned low,
To hear a voice that does not sing,
Oh, heart, dear heart, these things have hurt
Me more than anything.

COMING HOME

EVERY autumn, when I was a little girl,
My mother, noting the chill, and the frost's first sheen,
Would say, "It is time we were buying the winter things.
We must go tomorrow, father, to Muscatine."
And my brothers and sisters and I would dance for joy,
Knowing that at the first faint peep of day
The two of them would start for the distant town,
Driving the sorrel, Dan, and Nell, the bay.
They would go to purchase the family's winter wear:
The suits, and the stockings, and the sturdy shoes,
The flannel for our dresses, bright with plaids,
With always a winter coat or two to choose.

The day they left we would watch the clock's slow hours,
Until at last, when the twilight glowed,
Knowing that they would soon be coming home,
We would race down the lane that led to the open road,
And peer along the ground where the earth and sky
Met in a line, and suddenly we would sight
The tossing heads of the horses as they came,
Silhouetted darkly against the night.

* * * * * *

Oh, the years are many since those old autumn days,
And long are the winding roads I chose to roam,

But tears still catch at my heart when I recall
How tired they were those nights when they came home.
And I cannot see for the tears—remembering
The empty road, with the silent years between;
But glimmeringly, I still can see the things
They brought those autumn nights from Muscatine.

A SUNSET BELL

THIS is a thing that I remember
Crystal-clear from my girlhood days;
A sunset bell in a far, white steeple,
Calling the village to prayer and praise.

Over the fields came a peal of silver,
Sharp on the air as a bugle blown,
Setting the evening air a-quiver
With the sweetest notes I ever have known:

A mingle of sound and light and color—
A call like a voice down the sunset way,
And the village folk would stop their labor,
And pause for a little while to pray.

* * * * * *

Sometimes now of a smoky evening,
Above the city's clamor and din,
I think that I surely catch the echo
Of a sunset bell pealing high and thin.

But no one stops for a breathless moment,
And no one prays at the far, sweet call—
I wonder . . . perhaps I am mistaken,
And it was not a bell that I heard, at all.

". . . AND THEY FOLLOWED HIM"

HE walked the highways—up small streets and down
And on the shore-roads by the glittering sea,
But whether in the country or in the town
They sought Him ceaselessly.
Men closed their shops—they left their plows to seek
The many roads He took beneath the sun;
And women, eager to see Him—hear Him speak—
Left every task undone;
Their little children, stumbling at their side,
That they might see this Healer, Teacher, Guide.

That all might see Him! oh, I wish today
That He were here along some city street,
Or country lane, and we could find the way
On eager, stumbling feet:
Our men to leave their shops and plows to go—
Our women, every household task to find
The One who had compassion long ago
Upon the deaf and blind.
We are so deaf and blind . . . Dear God, I pray
That somewhere we shall find Him on the way.

A POEM FOR A NEW HOUSE

THIS house is built of mortar and of wood,
Of waiting long, and of our heart's desire;
Now it is finished, let us lay the hearth,
And light a fire
(Lord, may it keep us warm when days are cold,
Though we be young, or old.)

The close-laid shingles gleam with golden light,
They are so strong, so fragrant, and so new;
The waters of the years will try them, yet
No rain drip through.
(Lord, may this shelter be a sure retreat
Through rain and snow and heat.)

The windows of our house let in the sun,
And clean air when days are long and bright:
Wide windows through which heaven's breath may come,
And heaven's light.
(Lord, may this be a safe, sweet place to rest,
Then come, Lord, be our guest.)

WATCHERS

A MORNING in September comes
When women stand to see
Mere babies faring forth to meet
A world's complexity;
They loose small hands, they bid them go,
They watch them yearningly.

So brief, so swift, the years have been,
So dear with constant care,
And now bereft at open doors
Stand women everywhere,
Within their eyes a wistful light,
Upon their lips, a prayer.

Dear God, compassionate to all,
I pray Thee, keep apart
A little space of tenderness
Within Thy sheltering heart,
For women, watching through their tears,
An eager child depart.

A mother's need is great that hour,
Oh, come to her, I pray,
And reassure her, God, and take
The anxious care away,
Then go with every child who goes,
And stay with them, I pray.

AN INTERIOR

A QUIET room, with sunlight on its floor,
A stove, a chair, a table and a clock,
A curtained window, and an open door,
A breath of bloom, a peering hollyhock;
Enamel gleaming, cup towels hung with care,
The shine of dishes, and the glint of tin,
A bit of bright, clear color here and there
Where some home-loving woman's touch has been.

This is the quiet hour of afternoon,
And she has left her kitchen clean and sweet.
It wears a look as if one would come soon
To move about it on light, happy feet.
Oh, any room would be too bleak and bare
Unless it shows a woman has been there.

THE HOMEKEEPER

MY days are filled
With a thousand lovely things:
Tasks that are glorified,
Services, most sweet.

Daily my kitchen fire
Glows like a scarlet flower.
I cook juicy brown meats,
And crisp green vegetables.
I spread my table with a cloth of snow,
And fetch clean, shining plates,
And sparkling silver,
And spread them in proud array.
I run out into the dew
And gather long-stemmed pink and saffron roses.
I bring them in, and put them in slender vases.

I delight in stemming crimson berries
Into a crystal bowl,
Staining my fingers deliciously
With their wet fragrance.
The tinkle of tender green peas
Dropping from their pods
Into a bright pan,
Is to me like a little singing tune.

The old woods of my furniture
Are lustrous after their dusting.
They spell to me Romance of wide-wooded places
That I love—and catch my breath, remembering.
I sew long, straight seams
Upon snowy, billowing muslins;
I stitch bright threads
With a glistening needle.
I go light-footed over cool green grass
To hang white, wet linen upon the line to dry,
Its gay flap, flap, in the morning sun
Is to me like a young girl's laughter.

I find it sweet to spread fresh, clean sheets
Upon my beds, where those I love will rest
When night dims my pleasant rooms.
Surely my days are beautiful
With a thousand lovely things:
Tasks that are glorified,
Services, most sweet.

A BOWL OF ROSES

THERE is no woman who can place
A bowl of roses on a shelf,
Without an upward, inward urge
To be more beautiful herself.

There is no woman who can keep
Disorder in her room
Where chastely fresh-cut roses shed
The light and fragrance of their bloom.

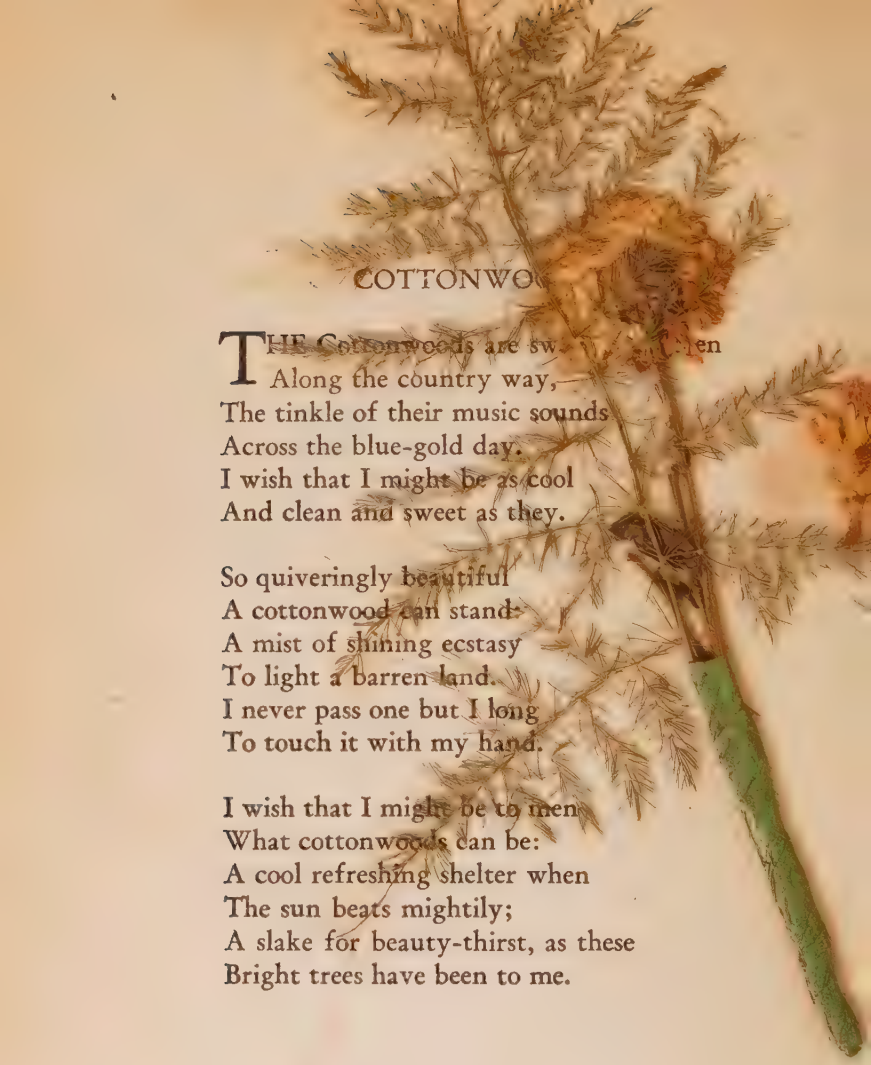
Something there is of rain and wind,
Of sunlight, and of fresh, clean air
Held captive where a bowl is filled
With roses, and placed anywhere,

That works a charm on ugliness,
And brightens all dark-cornered gloom.
A bowl of roses can perform
A miracle in any room.

FIRST DARKNESS

WHAT did they think, these two, when darkness came
That first spring night in Eden? Did they stand
And watch the new sun sink in fire and flame,
And see the color fade along the land,
Bewildered, frightened, wondering had it gone
Forever from them—that thing warm and bright,
And left them there, not knowing that the dawn
Would come and gild their garden with its light?

I think they clung together in the dark,
When suddenly before their eyes there swung
A full round disc, and then a strange white spark
Lit on the tallest cedar-tip, and hung.
And reassured, he broke the boughs of fir,
And she slept there, and he watched over her.



COTTONWO

THE Cottonwoods are sw[illegible]en
Along the country way,
The tinkle of their music sounds
Across the blue-gold day.
I wish that I might be as cool
And clean and sweet as they.

So quiveringly beautiful
A cottonwood can stand:
A mist of shining ecstasy
To light a barren land.
I never pass one but I long
To touch it with my hand.

I wish that I might be to men
What cottonwoods can be:
A cool refreshing shelter when
The sun beats mightily;
A slake for beauty-thirst, as these
Bright trees have been to me.

WHITE TREES

THE stark white nakedness of sycamores
Carved on the gray
Of this dark day,
And on my mind—
Will be as unforgettable as light
To one struck blind.

As inerasible as chiselled print
These trees will stand
To light the land.
Year after year
Others will come, and love them as I do,
And I, not here.

When I am dead, these trees will still shine on.
The earth will give
Them power to live.
Oh, surely I
Shall have as much white, silent strength as they
To reach the sky.

RACERS

WHEN high winds run their races in the sun,
And tall trees dip beneath their flying feet,
I mark the sinewed racers, one by one,
Crash out across the glinting, yellow wheat:
Clean wind from pasturelands above blue seas,
And wind that, day-long, leaps the plain's bright grass,
The foaming silver wind from old birch trees,
And bugled wind from some far mountain pass.

Their lips pressed close, their breath an emerald wine,
Their nostrils flared, each faces toward the sun,
Their hearts one glowing tumult, eyes a-shine,
And swifter than oriole wings their light feet run.
O wind from the far wild places of the sky—
I, too, am a racer, as you pass me by.

I DO NOT LIKE A ROOF TONIGHT

I DO not like a roof tonight.
I long to walk a barren field, or lie
Face upward on a hill, and watch the sky
Spangled with silver, and to know
That one night long ago,
These same stars, with the same hand guiding them,
Shone down on Bethlehem.

A roof shuts out the stars—it drugs with sleep.
I wish I were a shepherd of white sheep,
Out on the hills, and for their sake
Must keep awake . . .
And I could watch the radiance of the sky,
The rapture of the slow stars marching by:
The near ones bright—the far ones very dim,
But speaking, every one, of Him.

I do not like a roof tonight.
But from the fields, if I should hasten down
Toward the glimmering lights of any town,
I think that I would find the Christ-child there,
Under a star somewhere.
Faith or fancy, call it as you will—
The stars at Christmas guide me to Him still.

A CANDLE

A CANDLE is a lovely thing
To light for Him tonight:
A slim, white candle, straight and tall,
To make the darkness bright.

So white He was, so tall and straight,
That all the dark was lit:
A pathway widening on ahead
When He walked into it.

A candle burning in the night!
A symbol of the One
Who shed a glow of circling light
Until His work was done—

Then flickering out upon a cross,
Upon a darkened hill,
It lit again, the Light of Earth,
And it is burning still.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING AFTER SCHOOL

WITH five in a family—a quarter to spend—
There was never a happier child than I,
As I trudged to town on a snowy day
For the beautiful things that my money would buy.

The silver coins in my mittened palm,
The snow flakes white on my crimson hood,
And in my breast an excited heart
Fluttered as any glad thing would.

And there was the shop down the little street,
The quaintest shop that you ever could see,
Where a jovial man, and his rosy wife,
Were the smiling merchants who welcomed me:

A small, eager girl with snow in her eyes,
Half blind with the glitter of tinsel that hung
From ceiling to counter, from window to door,
With baubles that glinted and glittered and swung.

A glorious counter to linger beside,
And every decision a momentous thing:
A doll, or a jew's harp, a flower-sprigged mug,
Or a whirl-i-gig top that danced on a string?

Small gifts with the heart of the giver thrown in,
All purchased and wrapped to the last splendid one,
And with five packages under my arms,
My feet would trudge homeward, my gay shopping done.

* * * * * *

O dear little girl, going back through the dusk,
To home, to a window, a lamp shining through,
I could cry for the things that the long years have lost—
How I wish I could shop again, some day with you.

A PRAYER UPON A THRESHOLD

HERE on my threshold, eager to start
Out through a New Year, Lord, I stand,
Waiting a moment, a prayer in my heart:
Go with me, Lord, and hold my hand.

There are such beautiful days ahead,
Blinding my eyes, Lord, may there be
Springs by the wayside, manna for bread,
And You, a companion, to walk with me.

Through any dark day, talk with me,
I am a small child, often afraid;
Lead through the darkness, let me see
Light ahead that your lamp has made.

Here on the threshold, ready to start
Out through a year, untrod, unknown—
Now with a small child's trusting heart
I go, but I do not go alone.

WHITE NARCISSUS

HERE in a sealed globe lies a flower of Heaven
Its sepulcher unlit,
And to no earthly hand has there been given
The power to open it.

Faint breathing—a slight stirring to awaken—
Attempting to arise,
Blind in the darkness, tremulous and shaken
With passion and surprise.

Sharp through the crevice, one thin shaft of brightness
Pierces its spangled way;
Brown husks rend with sudden glorious lightness—
The stone is rolled away!

Life out of death! The straight shoots, green and tender,
Clumb upward through the night;
Young as the morning, young and sweet and slender
To flower in dazzling light.

Here is a resurrection—here is glory—
Quick are my tears to start!
Here is the repetition of a story
A world holds to its heart.

THE GARDEN PARTY

THE night has wrought a miracle
Of strange enchantment in this place:
The pale moon glimmers through the leaves
And sprays the grass with lace;
The paper lanterns swing and dip
Upon their hidden silver wires,
And every shadowed nook is lit
With swaying, colored fires.
The close-clipped grass is velvet-smooth,
The paths are bordered deep
By dark blooms heavy in the night
With fragrance and with sleep.

And Youth moves out across the grass,
Light-footed, swaying, gay—
The night has stolen every care
And taken it away.
A dusk-eyed girl comes through the gate—
To twanging silver strings
She flings her dark head back—she parts
Her full red lips, and sings.

And all the romance of old Spain,
The madness of each mad, glad year,
She flings from her white throat and sets
Its fires flaming here.
Out through the dusk the song lifts up—
Then dies upon the summer air,
And leaves a memory too sweet
For any heart to bear.

THE PEDDLER

EVERY so often he comes to my door.
I hear a shuffling step,
And the clump of a cane on the walk,
And I know it is he.
With a half sigh, I brush the flour from my hands,
And leave my unshaped loaf,
Or, I lay my pen down cautiously
Beside a glittering-winged poem,
And go to the door.

"Good morning, I was just passing by,
And I thought you might be needing something,"
He always says, just like that.
And I smile. I know the petty deceit.
He has walked blocks to come to me,
Because I listen to him, I listen, and am sorry.

He opens his old worn satchel
To the same soiled lace, gay threads and dull needles,
Aluminum thimbles, and spectacles.
He fumbles awkwardly among the laces
Trying to show me a new pattern.
He holds an old one up for my inspection,
And I admire it immensely—never letting him know.

"I haven't been so well of late," he says.
"I don't sleep much nights.
The boarding house keeps mighty noisy,
Some young fellows always playing the piano.
My eyes? They seem to be getting worse
Instead of better.
Sometimes I wonder how long 'twill be
Before they go completely.
Yes, there are some pins in there some place,
You'll have to find them.
I can't remember where I put things.
I don't sell much these days,
Most women seem to like to buy down town.

"I get mighty lonesome at times.
Boarding houses are queer places,
Sort of lonesome places,
And I miss her—more and more.
She was a good wife,
Always around doing things, and singing.
I liked to hear her sing.
It most killed me when she went.

"And then my eyes went.
I keep hoping they'll get better.
I get discouraged at times—
It's a mighty pretty world
If a body could only see it—
A mighty pretty world.
Maybe the Almighty thinks I'm better off this way,
Maybe He does, I don't know."

I listen and I buy
Spools of pink and purple thread
That I shall never use.
I have bolts of lace
Fit only for a peasant's garments,
And I have more thimbles than I have fingertips.
One cannot hurt self-respect with charity
When there are things to buy.

I help him gather up his scattered stock.
I hand him his cane.
I show him where the sun marks dark shadows on the steps,
And I caution him lest he fall there.
I ask him to come again.
I tell him that I am depending upon him.
And someway, I think he goes away
A little straighter and prouder than he came.

I watch him go, and I wish that he might see.
Then I go back to my waiting loaf,
Or, I go to the glistening-winged poem,
And find it has taken flight.
I could not have captured it anyway,
For I would be thinking—thinking
Of an evening on a wayside out from Jericho,
Of another blind man,
And, of the sudden, glad lifted cry:
"Jesus of Nazareth passeth by!"

GODEY'S LADY'S BOOK

(Bound Volume, 1849)

I TURN the ash-dry pages guardedly,
Lest suddenly they crumble into dust:
Here stands a languid lady, and I see
The purple of her hooped skirt stained with rust.
The clustered roses, crimson in her hair,
The nosegay at her breast, untouched by years,
Are exquisitely colored, so they wear
The look of garden flowers glimpsed through tears.

"A poem to a Proud and Lovely Lady"
Shines on a page as delicate as lace;
"The Dancing lesson, Pirouette and Whirl,"
A soft woodcut, and steel engravings trace
"A Swooning Maiden, at her Lover's Bier,"
"The Playful Kitten," and "A Ship at Sea,"
"Hints on Equestrianism," I find here,
And an antimacassar's quaint embroidery.

But oh, the dear dead women! Long ago
The fashion changed—the fichu and the frill
Are quite forgotten, save as old books show
The love that women bore, are bearing still
For fabrics, beautiful in line and grace,
For garments, cut and fit with artful care,
For softly clinging silks, for frail sheer lace,
That gentlewomen loved—still love, and wear.

THE HEALING YEARS

November, 1918

THEY tell me that this grief will fade with years,
And that I shall forget, as it grows dim,
The bitterness, the agony, the tears,
This terrifying loneliness for him.

They come with futile words to comfort me,
These kindly ones, but no one understands!
There is no waking moment but I see
Him close enough to touch his face—his hands.

I shall go on, perhaps. Grief does not kill
Or I had died that day. My feet may go
Along old ways, my empty hands may fill,
But I shall not forget him, this I know.

November, 1928

Ah, wise were they who told me grief would cease!
The agony—some way—did yield to tears,
And tears to blessed quietness and peace,
And there has come a vision through the years:

I see him now with laughter in his eyes,
And he is strong, and he is safe and free.
He has been spared so much—he is so wise,
And he is waiting down the years for me.

Remembering him thus—and comforted—
I walk familiar ways his feet have trod,
Recalling him, his look—the words he said,
The heart-break eased forever, now, thank God!

THE NEXT HILL

"WHEN I get over the next hill,"
I always used to say,
"There will lie the loveliest road
That I have seen today."

If it were a long road,
Seeming without an end,
"Always over the next hill,"
Was best, I would pretend.

"Always over the next hill . . ."
(The habit clings, and clings)
"There will be something to take my breath
And give me the feel of wings.

"There will be distance! distance!
The downward dip of the skies,
The tang of the wind on my face and throat,
And the sunlight in my eyes!"

On and over the next hill—
It always will be so,
Beauty will race ahead of me
The farthest road I go.

LANDSCAPE IN BLACK AND WHITE

A WHITE winter world
Hemmed by black hedges;
Steel-sharp winds
Whirled to whiteness;
An indistinct line
Of blown trees
Staggering across a blurred hill.

White sheep huddle together
In a fence corner,
Stamping delicate hoofs,
Blowing thin nostrils;
Young colts, haunches to the wind
Shiver in the pale-gold winter sunshine;
The stark black tracery of twigs
Crackling against a whiteness;
A crow winging a windy flight,
Cawing mournfully above dead corn stalks;
A river of black silence—
The gurgle of its throat
Choked between white fingers.

Beyond the wide fields
Black cloud bank in the West,
Brooding on tomorrow,
It is so cold—if the sun

Should suddenly flame red,
I would run to the edge of the world,
And reach out
To warm my hands at its fire.

PENNIES FOR JOY

LEAN Poverty may stalk a street
With Want to watch him pass,
Yet almost any house may have
A tiny plot of grass.

And seldom is a yard so small
But somewhere there will be
A silver space to hold the slim,
Glad wonder of a tree.

The dinginess of weathered boards
May take new light, and shine,
For any little house can have
A morning-glory vine.

A sapling, and a flower seed,
A penny spent, or two,
And barren soil will rift, and let
A blinding beauty through.

Oh, any house, where water is,
May be so clean and sweet,
That Poverty will hurry by,
Ashamed to stalk that street.

OF ONE WHO LIVED VALIANTLY

SHE who lived valiantly has passed,
Why should we grieve,
Why should it break our hearts like this
If we believe?

Surely she lives more valiantly
Than ever before,
Freed, as she is, to move without
The weights she bore;

Freed for the sweet adventurings
Of heavenly days,
Lightened, to go exploring down
The glory-ways.

What must these first hours be to her
Who loved earth so?
How swift, how very swift and glad
Her feet must go!

She who lived valiantly has passed,
Why should we grieve?
Why should it break our hearts like this
If we believe?

THE TIME IS BRIEF

BECAUSE the longest life is brief,
I must be swift in keeping
The little trysts with kindliness
Before the last long sleeping.

I must be swift in reaching out
To those whose hearts are yearning,
Oh, swift indeed to love them much
Before the road's last turning.

I must be quick to give the days
My earnest, wise endeavor,
Some day I know a door will close,
And shut me in forever.

Before that great, strange silence falls,
I surely must be saying
The words that I have failed to say,
The prayers I should be saying.

YEARS BE KIND

YEARS, be kind,
You go so swift, I pray
For you to tarry down the way,
And wait for me.
There is so much to do,
So much to learn
Each day.

Go slowly, Years,
For fear I shall not know
Among the many roads,
Which road to go.
For fear, onrushing, I shall fail
To love, to live, to grow.

Years, be kind.
Take lighter toll of me,
And bid me pass
Light-footed on the grass.
Loose me of burdens,
Loose me of pain and tears;
Fit me at last that I may keep
Pace with Eternal Years.